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THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE WASHINGTON

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SUBJECT: CHIANG Ching-kuo as a Successor to President CHIANG Kai-shek.

With respect to speculation whether General CHIANG Ching-kuo might succeed to the presidency of the Republic of China upon his father's death Dr. [REDACTED] Associate Professor at Yale Univer-
[REDACTED] made the following observations to the Reporting Officer on April 19, 1955.

If President CHIANG Kai-shek were to die, he would be succeeded in the presidency by Vice President CH'EN Ch'eng -- not by his elder son, General CHIANG Ching-kuo.

The elder son does not have the political experience or organization to put himself in the presidency as he is, in effect, a "returned student" from Russia. That he is a powerful figure on Taiwan is due to his skillful use of the power which his father has given him and to the fact of his close association with his father. He is not surrounded by henchmen and he does not have the network of personal relationships so important in Chinese politics. Moreover, he is a relatively young man in this field. Despite his power, he is not of great stature in the Army or in the Party.

COMMENT:

A question almost invariably asked by journalists and other serious-minded visitors to Free China is: "If the Gimo were to die, would Chiang Ching-kuo become President?". The RO is inclined to agree with Dr. [REDACTED]'s reply to this query... and to add the following remarks.

The Chinese Government (President Chiang, the Cabinet, the Legislative Yuan, et cetera) has evinced a strong desire to do things legally and constitutionally -- in preference to taking the nearest way. The extraordinary and unanticipated circumstances under which the National Government, especially, has to operate on Taiwan has made for some "liberal" constructions of the Chinese Constitution (in the tradition of John MARSHALL and with good American precedent).

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It is thought significant, however, that so much effort has been made to find constitutional means to extend year after year, the terms of the Legislative Yuan members, to obtain a quorum in the National Assembly and to authorize other essential measures. Judicial Yuan President WANG Chung-hui (long a judge of the International Court of Justice at The Hague) has been ingenious in finding constitutional solutions to problems of the above type. The concern of the Chinese authorities to have constitutional or legal sanction for their actions likely reflects their wish to do things properly (for the sake of the proprieties) and their respect for United States and world opinion.

The importance which the Chinese Government attaches to maintenance of its position as the legal government of China has also tended to emphasize the necessity of not weakening the legality of the governmental structure by failure to observe constitutional forms.

In the event of President Chiang's death, the above-described situation, the RO believes, would be a strong deterrent to the use of unconstitutional or extra-legal methods to keep Vice President Ch'en Ch'eng from succeeding to the presidency.

Another important factor -- perhaps a more potent one -- that would tend to prevent a coup d'etat in favor of General Chiang Ching-kuo (or anyone else) is the essentiality and magnitude of United States military and economic assistance to Free China. Chinese officialdom strives for the good opinion of the American people and regards that opinion as directly related to United States military and economic aid to the Chinese Government. The publicity that the Chinese authorities give to democratic progress in Free China (and their agitation at accounts of Taiwan being "a police state", freedom of press being restricted, the Taiwanese being left out of government, et cetera) is a manifestation of their preoccupation with American opinion. It seems improbable that the leaders of Free China would underestimate the unfavorable reaction most Americans would have to a coup d'etat in Taipei or the bad effect it would likely have on United States aid to the Chinese Government. Any one who sought to seize control of the Chinese Government would surely take into account the great difficulties he might expect to face if/came to power in a manner offensive to the American people. he

It is pertinent to mention in the foregoing connection that Free China (although regarding the United States as its only significant friend) is also jealous of its international standing and seeks to establish itself as a democracy faithful in observing international law, et cetera in contrast to the lawlessness and barbarity of the regime at Peiping. A coup d'etat would hardly serve these ends.

A practical comment upon the idea of General Chiang Ching-kuo

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unconstitutionally following his father in the presidency is that the Chinese presidential office is not inherently one of great power. The position of the Chinese President resembles that of the French President ~~and not the American President.~~

President Chiang Kai-shek exercises great power not because he is President of the Republic of China but because he is Director General of the Kuomintang and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. If his successor had only the title of President and was not an important figure in the Party and in the Army he would not count for too much in the power setup on Taiwan.

As a corollary it may be said that if, under his father's aegis, General Chiang Ching-kuo continues to extend and consolidate his power in the Army and the Party he can be nonchalant about who assumes the presidential mantle upon his father's demise. It would seem foolish of him, therefore, to resort to strong-arm methods.

Note: A copy of this despatch has been pouched to Hong Kong.

For the Ambassador:

Donald E. Webster

Donald E. Webster
First Secretary of Embassy

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